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THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA,

TUESDAY, 12 JUNE, 1973

PRIME MINISTER: Thanks for waiting ladies and gentlemen.

As you know, we have had a particularly long day of Cabinet committees and Cabinet meetings today and we weren't able to get through as early as usual. But, after all, there usen't to be press conferences after Cabinet meetings were there? I can't give you all the decisions because some of them require meetings of the Executive Council or consultations with all the Premiers or at least messages to some of the Premiers. But I will give you the other matters. Now because I have come straight from the meeting you will have to bear with me while I look them up, and I mightn't be able to give you the full background to all of the matters because I have just brought the essential headings. We decided to develop the district of Sanderson near Darwin by constructing the neighbourhood units of Malak and Karama and associated works and to refer to the Public Works Committee designs for the whole project. We decided to amend the Lands Acquisition Act in certain respects. Perhaps you would rather me give you the details there if you want them. We made a decision about not proceeding with the phase-one development of the proposed Australian Government offices at Melbourne as proposed in the report of the Public Works Committee and we made some other plans about the use of the balance of the property there. We decided to enter into negotiations with the Sydney Cove Re-development Authority for the acquisition of a site on which to erect a new Customs House and there were some associated matters concerning an environmental impact statement. We decided to stabilise land prices in the Northern Territory along the lines agreed between the Premiers of New South Wales and me on 25 January last in respect to Albury/Wodonga. We are proposing to the Premiers of Queensland and Western Australia that there should be a Northern Development Council under the Chairmanship of the Minister for Northern Development. The Council would be attended by Australian Ministers whose particular responsibilities occurred at any particular meeting. We have decided that three-quarters of the amount of D.F.R.B. pensions should be adjusted by the Superannuation Bill formula and that adjustments take effect from the first pension payday in the new financial year. We are referring to the Public Works Committee a proposal to erect a Workshop, Stores and Plant Pool Complex for the Department of Works at Kewdale, Western Australia. We will amend the Wireless Telegraphy Act to exclude references to Papua New Guinea. There are several other matters concerning Papua New Guinea which I will be giving you in a moment. Revaluation assistance for secondary industry will be made available to applicants which will be defined as a company and all its subsidiaries. There was a view that an applicant might be one subsidiary company although the whole complex of companies of which it was a part were not adversely affected at all by revaluation.

We adopted the Report of the Tariff Board on Synthetic Rubber Latex. We decided to extend the Cellulose Acetate Flake Bounty Act until the end of June 1976. We decided to approve the proposals for an international code to regulate Liner Shipping Conferences at the International Conference which Mr Jones is attending in that regard. Our decisions on the Karmel Committee's Report on Schools will be discussed with the Premiers at the conference with them at the end of the month. But there are a couple of decisions which I can give you arising out of the Karmel Report at the moment. We have decided to establish as a statutory body a Curriculum Development Centre. I can give you or Mr Beazley can give you further details of that legislation as we have decided so far. We have also decided to establish an Education Research Institute to undertake an expanded program of co-ordinated research such as hitherto has been carried out by the Australian Advisory Committee on Research and Development in Education. We have decided to amend the Papua New Guinea Act to enable the appointment of a judge to their Supreme Court whose qualifications and experience have been obtained outside Australia and to permit the appointment of a judge under a contract for a limited term. We approved, in principle, the arrangements made by Mr Jones and Mr Morrison with Mr Somare and Mr Jephcott about the Papua New Guinea national airline. We have approved in principle, but without commitment to funds at this stage, the establishment of an atmospheric baseline monitoring station and the provision of a number of regional atmospheric stations in Australia. We will make this decision known to the first meeting of the U.N. Governing Council for Environmental Programs which is meeting at the moment. We have endorsed the continued production of the Nomad aircraft and technical support for the project. Further details I can give you or Senator Bishop, the acting Minister for Supply, can give you. Finally, we have approved other amendments of the Papua New Guinea Act to facilitate self-government by 1 December or as soon thereafter as possible. This, as you know, has already been - the idea, the principle - accepted by the Papua New Guinea Government and House of Assembly as well as by the Australian Government. Once Papua New Guinea has self-government, the Administrator will be known as the High Commissioner. When Papua New Guinea achieves independence he will be known as - or there will be an Australian High Commissioner there. There has been some difficulty with title there, of course, because the British precedence would have dictated that the official should be known as Governor. That title would not be accepted in Papua New Guinea now.

Are there any questions?

Q. The West Australian Premier in London yesterday accused the Federal Government of a breach of faith on States' rights charging you with misinterpreting Labor Party policy. He referred to a previous Labor Attorney-General, Dr Evatt, assuring the States that the steps now taken would never be taken. Could we have your reaction to that please?

PRIME MINISTER: I wouldn't comment on a report at this distance. There has been no breach of any undertaking given by any of my predecessors.

Q. What's your reaction to the 29 per cent fee rise announced by the doctors, and also your reaction to their statement that fee rises will not be negotiable?

PRIME MINISTER: I was away last week. I am not familiar with the details here. Mr Hayden ought to comment on that.

Q. In recent weeks you have been highly critical of the States on the question of off-shore rights and the action of the six State Premiers in their petition to The Queen. The six State Premiers have now declared their unanimous opposition to the Commonwealth's off-shore legislation and to the abolition of appeals to the Privy Council. If in the attitude you have adopted on this question you are expressing federal A.L.P. policy, do you propose as a delegate to the Federal Executive or the Federal Conference to move to discipline the three State Labor Premiers concerned - Messrs Dunstan, Reece and Tonkin. If not, could you be accused of grandstanding?

PRIME MINISTER: That's a very sharp question coming from you Sir. I will be taking no steps to discipline any of the Labor Premiers. There is no question that the Australian Government has followed to abolish appeals to the Privy Council and to assert the Australian Government's jurisdiction over the territorial sea and the seabed beyond low-water mark are the policy of the Australian Labor Party. The Australian Labor Party's policy is binding on its members of parliament in the State Parliament no less than in the Australian Parliament. The principle of abolishing appeals to the Privy Council has stood since the Federal Conference of the party in 1908, when it was adopted unanimously. Nobody since has ever quibbled at this policy. And I wouldn't imagine that there are many people in public life who would not think it proper that the legal disputes between Australians should be settled within Australia by Australian judges appointed by Australian governments. The policy as regards off-shore resources was laid down at the party conference in Launceston in June 1971.

Q. While you were away Sir you were bleeped by Sir Frank Packer on Channel 9. I was wondering if you had any comment on that?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I did read something like that. But, I mean, I am well content if Sir Frank Packer just bleeps me instead of distorts me.

Q. Sir, can you tell us the words that were bleeped and who was the Bishop you were referring to?

PRIME MINISTER: Now the interviewer didn't mention any Bishop's name, nor therefore did I. But if the mitre fits.

Q. Your on record in past as saying several times that you approve the New South Wales method of pre-selection of candidates, at least up till 1970, which was by branches rather than by Federal Executive - by State Executive, and you used this, I think, against the Victorian method of pre-selection by State Executive. Can you tell us now whether you approve of the new method for Senate Upper House - State Upper House candidates which the New South Wales Conference has put through, or do you go along with your Minister for Urban and Regional Development, Mr Uren, who seems to think it is retrogressive move?

PRIME MINISTER: It's true that I preferred the method which has been adopted to choose candidates for individual seats in New South Wales over the method which used to be adopted for choosing candidates for individual seats in Victoria. In my own view, and I'm not a delegate to any State Conference - and I haven't been a delegate to any State conference since I have been a member of parliament - but to give my own view, I believe the method of choosing candidates now adopted in Victoria is the best in Australia.

Q. Sir, do you support Mr Uren's stand against the way the new system was adopted in New South Wales?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't comment on what my colleagues are reported to have said. I didn't hear Mr Uren. I don't think he was speaking from a text. I know, because he has shown me, that he has written a letter to the Sydney Morning Herald complaining of the misrepresentation and misquotations in the editorial in their paper today. And, I trust, that the Sydney Morning Herald will have the simple honesty and honour to publish Mr Uren's letter.

Q. Could you tell us the circumstances in which Mr Uren showed you this letter. Did you intervene in this dispute between him and Mr Ducker, the New South Wales President?

PRIME MINISTER: Now, whatever way I answer that question, you will expect me to endorse your assertion that there is a dispute between Mr Uren and Mr Ducker. I have not spoken to either concerning the newspaper reports. Mr Uren gave me, this afternoon, a copy of the letter which he has sent to the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald.

Q. On the Karmel committee report. Can you tell us if Cabinet approved the financial recommendation for 1974 and 1975?

PRIME MINISTER: I have nothing to add to what I have already said.

Q. While you were away last week, the Queensland Government decided not to accede to the request from your Government to take control of Aboriginal affairs. What if anything, is your next move.

PRIME MINISTER: We haven't had time to consider this. We won't take as long to consider it as the Queensland Government did. We will carry out the obligation which the Australian people overwhelmingly imposed on the Australian Parliament and Government at the referendum in 1966.

Q. Well how exactly will you go about this?

PRIME MINISTER: Well let's discuss it.

Q. The discussion on the code of conduct for Liner conferences at the UNCTAD meeting came up today. Was that decision consistent with the announcement that Mr Jones made sometime ago that 40 per cent of Australian mineral exports would be carried in Australian flag vessels.

PRIME MINISTER: Minerals are not carried in liners, even on the Australian runs.

Q. At the National Press Club last week, Dr Cairns told us that he had a conversation with the Prime Minister of Prince Sinhanouk's in exile. The Prime Minister asked him for Australia's moral influence to procure a halt to the bombing of Cambodia by the Americans and to bring about discussions between Prince Sinhanouk's government and the Lon Nol regime, and Dr Cairns said he had brought this to the attention of the Australian Government. Has anything been done about this yet?

PRIME MINISTER: Based on reports of what Dr Cairns had said to the National Press Club, my Department of Foreign Affairs did consult with him. There seemed to be some indication in the report that Australia might be able, or expected, to take some steps to bring together the disputants in Cambodia. An then enquiries were made overseas from several quarters. There seems to be some misunderstanding of reports of what was said, by whom or to whom. We have studied the texts of statements made by various parties including those of Prince Sinhanouk and conclude that at this stage there is no role for Australia as a mediator. If, however, we were to be asked by all parties to the present conflict to mediate or play some role in bringing the opposing sides together for talks, we would be prepared to consider it. On present indications, however, such a request seems unlikely.

Q. At the end of your discussions with Mr Marshall Green, the new United States Ambassador, on Friday, you suggested that you might have something to say about those discussions at your press conference today.

PRIME MINISTER: Did I?

A. Yes.

PRIME MINISTER: Well I never, and I don't think any of my predecessors ever have, made any comment after discussions of that character.

Q. Well you did suggest to us on the steps, Sir, that you might have something to say at your press conference today about the discussions,

PRIME MINISTER: Well we must have misunderstood each other because.... Let's be quite plain about it. No parties to any such discussion every give accounts afterwards. I never have.

Q. Can you say anything at all about your proposed trip to Washington as a result of these discussions?

PRIME MINISTER: No. No. I said I would keep you fully informed. I have no further information for you.

Q. My question relates to parliamentary privileges. If I may background this question a little bit, as far as the right to report proceedings is concerned, I understand that parliament inherits the privileges of the House of Commons which date back to the 18th century. This, in fact, does not provide a strict right to report proceedings in federal parliament. Would you agree that it is time that parliament legislated to define what its privileges are, especially in relation to journalists?

PRIME MINISTER: I would like to see Parliament do this but I know that predecessors of mine have all said the same thing and we have never got round to doing it. I would hope that the Privileges committees on the two Houses might do something about it. I know that Mr Enderby, who is on the House of Representatives Privileges committee, has this very much in mind. But I must be quite frank with you, there's so much that has to be done by way of legislation that I can't hold out any hope that we will get around to it very quickly. It's something that really parliamentary committees can deal with. It's not something that the Government has to do alone. I am not saying Government hasn't got some responsibility in this respect but really the privileges committees of the two Houses of this parliament could do it - preferably jointly.

Q. Have you yet received the report from the Task Force headed by Dr Coombs?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q. The New South Wales Branch of the R.S.L. has suggested that you swear allegiance to the Queen?

PRIME MINISTER: The New South Wales Branch has?

A. Sub-branch.

PRIME MINISTER: No, I am going by A.B.C. reports which are prima facie accurate. I think it was the Inverell sub-branch.

A. I apologise. Well, irrespective.... They require under their rules that you swear allegiance to the Queen or relinquish membership....

PRIME MINISTER: Well, if they care to write to me I will give them the addresses of the half dozen R.S.L. sub-branches of which I am a member or an associate member. And they can move there I don't think they will get any support for it.

Q. Did your comments in Adelaide on Sunday mean that the Federal Government intends to withdraw its support for wheat stabilization. And if so, when? If not, can you clarify those remarks?

PRIME MINISTER: No. It didn't mean any of those things. What I was saying ... I mean I don't know how many of you were in Adelaide but what I was pointing out to the convention of the Labor Party in Adelaide on the weekend was that any Government has to decide on priorities. It has to make choices between different desirables and there are some things to which the Labor Party is committed, which it has initiated, there are others which its predecessors or opponents initiated or support and we will obviously in the Budget context have to make choices between such matters...and I gave two illustrations. Of course I made no commitment in these matters. Incidentally, this becomes very difficult as you know, when I am asked at a press conference to make comment on some newspaper report, sometimes in another State. Well, communications should not be so difficult in that respect, but I notice there was a terrific to-do while I was in India about something I said - it was on a T.V. interview - about Waltzing Matilda. Now I'm not committing myself. I would hope that we would do something better than Waltzing Matilda or better than God Save The Queen. But what I said to this interviewer on Delhi T.V. was that judging by the correspondence received by the committee on this matter Waltzing Matilda is the favourite. I'm not committing myself to it, but as I've said previously Waltzing Matilda would scarcely be appropriate in my view at say a State Funeral. I don't overlook the fact that the last couple of lines or so are often rendered in rather a funeral way. It is very difficult gentlemen, you know when you are asked at one press conference something based on a report of an earlier one, sometimes thousands of miles away.

Q. Have you given any consideration to the obstruction of legislation by the Senate, and if so what action will you take? Will you call the House of Representatives back?

PRIME MINISTER: I haven't discussed this with my colleagues. Perhaps I should say that I don't propose, as at present advised, to call the Reps back. The reason why I should say this at this stage is that when I made an earlier statement on this I was going on the view that amendments which the Senate made and which are unacceptable to the House of Representatives, should be do declared unacceptable by the House of Representatives promptly, so that the three months can commence from that declaration by the House of Representatives. There has been a legal view to this effect, but since then I have taken advice and their seems to be another view - and probably a wider view - that the three months dates from the time that the Senate made the amendments and the fact that the House of Representatives later refused to accept those amendments isn't a necessary starting point for the three months. It is enough if, for instance,

the House of Representatives says we won't accept these amendments and forthwith sends the bill up again.

Q. It doesn't need to be knocked back a second time.

PRIME MINISTER: No. Well I'm not sure about the details there. The point is, when I was speaking earlier I thought that the three months could only date from the time the House of Representatives rejected those amendments. Now once the three months, in the prevalent view, dates from the time the Senate made the amendments which the House of Representatives later declares that it will not accept. So there will be no need to call the House of Representatives together to declare them unacceptable.

Q. Have you had legal advice on this?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

Q. Over the past few days, have you gained the impression that the United States Administration would like the Australian Government to modify or change the direction of its foreign policy away from its independent stance?

PRIME MINISTER: No. This is a very well phrased question but I have not got such an impression.

Q. Do you support the principle that Ministers in your Government who receive substantial living-away-from-home allowances when they are in Canberra should have the right to have subsidised homes' provided for them by the Government?

PRIME MINISTER: The allowance is paid, as I understand it, in respect of any period that a minister lives away from the place which he designates as his home. Some ministers designate Canberra as their home. I think, as Prime Minister, I designated Canberra as my home although, so far, (I've held the job for six months) I have not put in for any travel or away-from-home allowances. I don't know when I will get around to it. I'm not quite sure what the situation is. But away-from-home allowance is based on where you declare your home to be.

Q. What I am getting at Sir, should ministers who receive substantial salaries be able to rent Government houses at \$16 or \$19 a week when the ordinary member of the public can't do so?

PRIME MINISTER: I believe that ministers should be able to rent houses in Canberra if that enables them to do their job better. And I believe that they shouldn't get any advantage as regards rent. There is no case, I am told, where they do. At the same time I don't believe that they should pay any higher rent than other people.

Q. Have you, Sir, got the impression over the past three or four days that President Nixon will be in Washington when you make your visit there at the end of July.

PRIME MINISTER: That question isn't so well phrased. I have got nothing to add.

Q. Have you got any further information on the Australian Yugoslavs in jail in Yugoslavia?

PRIME MINISTER: No I have had no more information than that which was given in the Senate last Thursday.

Q. On the question of ministerial housing again, Sir. Do you believe that ministers should go to the top of the priority list for housing or flats.

PRIME MINISTER: Close to it. A minister has an important job to do and in many cases that job can be best done by him living in Canberra.

Q. Why can't the ministers rent from private enterprise?

PRIME MINISTER: Many of them do. Most of them do.

Q. Sir, India belongs to the Commonwealth - you would agree with that?

PRIME MINISTER: My word - and likes to remain in it.

Q. Well, this is a little out of your camp, but could you ask your P.M.G. why they refuse to give India the Commonwealth press rate: five pence a word for the press rate against three cents a word in the Commonwealth?

PRIME MINISTER: I will find out. One of the very great things that Britain did for the world was the Penny Post and I believe that there is within the Empire, wasn't it, I don't think it was all over the world. And I believe there is very great advantage in having as cheap communication rates as possible between all members of the Commonwealth. And I regret to hear that this is not the case with India. One reason, of course, why we get so much news out of Singapore is that the rate applies there, whereas, of course it conspicuously doesn't apply to Indonesia which isn't in the Commonwealth. I am surprised to learn that it doesn't apply to India, and I will follow up what you say.

Q. Has Cuba made an approach to the Australian Government to open consular relations with your Government, and if so, what would be your reply?

PRIME MINISTER: I see there has been something in the papers while I have been away about this. Months ago, the question was raised of Cuba having a Consulate or Consulate-General in Australia. We took the attitude that the amount of business that Australia had with Cuba didn't yet justify a consulate. These are the countries in Latin America which do have consulates in Australia. Some of these, incidentally, are only honorary consuls. That is, certainly the case in Central America. There is Bolivia, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatamala, Haiti, Honduras, Panama and Venezuala. In embassies we have representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay. So Cuba's trade with Australia doesn't justify consular representation at this stage.

Q. Would we do any more business with Haiti than we do with Cuba?

PRIME MINISTER: I think that is honorary.

Q. What reasons did Cuba advance to the Australian Government or representatives for wanting a consulate in Australia?

PRIME MINISTER: I forget what the....Really, it was quite some months ago.

Q. You gave an interview to a Melbourne newspaper, "The Age", in which you referred to....

PRIME MINISTER: To the distinguished editor of "The Age", who was fortunate enough to have it syndicated in many other papers.

Q. You said that since the Labor Government came to power diplomatic relations have been established with every country in Europe except Albania.

PRIME MINISTER: That's right.

Q. So, one was left wondering why Albania?

PRIME MINISTER: We feared the charge of cossetting communists if we opened diplomatic relations with Albania. Let me hasten to assure you: we recognise Albania. Even our predecessors recognised Albania, but frankly we haven't got round to establishing diplomatic representation with Albania. Perhaps to be complete, we recognise but do not have diplomatic representation in Andorra, Lichtenstein, San Marino and Monarco, although there is a distinguished Australian resident in Monarco.

Q. Sir, was that a serious reply when you said you feared the charge that we were cossetting communists?

PRIME MINISTER: No, of course it wasn't a serious reply. No, the fact is that there is not, at this stage, a sufficient amount of business to justify having diplomatic representation - even on a multiple basis - with Albania. I dare say that we shall, but the representation we have established in Europe has been with countries which have considerably more - sometimes quite substantial relations, with Australia, namely, Poland, I beg your pardon, East Germany, Cyprus and the Vatican.

Q. On the question of Cuba, Sir, did you seek the opinion of the Australian Ambassador in Washington as to the likely American view if we did exchange or have some.....

PRIME MINISTER: I forget, but I doubt it.

Q. We have not taken any cognisance of the likely American reaction?

PRIME MINISTER: I suppose we did. Of course one takes this into account. But the point is, there are quite a number of Latin American countries which would have an equal claim to consular representation as has Cuba. Where we have concentrated on diplomatic representations is in Europe and in East Asia, and in

Southern Asia. And in those cases our representation is almost complete. But, for instance, there are many Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean with which we have no diplomatic or consular representation.

Q. What I'm getting at, sir, is: Were we influenced in not having diplomatic relations with Cuba because we feared that this might offend the United States Government?

PRIME MINISTER: It would have been one factor. But not the sole factor nor necessarily the predominant factor. You look at the Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean with which, at this stage, we don't have diplomatic representation. The fact is that there is a limit to the number of people that we can have representing us overseas even, as is so often the case now, on a multiple basis. We can't over-stretch our resources.

Q. Isn't it very rare to reject an application to set up a consular office here? Is it absolutely necessary that you reciprocate it?

PRIME MINISTER: Etiquette would require it, yet. But don't put it on the basis of rejection.

Q. My understanding is that they asked.

PRIME MINISTER: Well I suppose our answer was "Not at this stage". Don't get the impression that there is a rejection in the sense of never or we won't.

Q. It was the way you phrased your answers, that it was necessary we reciprocate.

PRIME MINISTER: It would be the usual thing. And there was a case, as you know, quite recently, within the last two years, where another country withdrew its ambassador, closed its embassy, because after many many years we had never established an embassy in that country. And there was another a few years ago where the same thing happened. The fact is that if you accept an ambassador or consul from another country the normal thing is - the proper thing is - to reciprocate. And at this stage in our resources, Cuba can't be justified.
